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STATEMENT OF
BRIGADIER GENERAL R. P. MILLS
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
DIRECTOR PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT DIVISION
BEFORE THE
MILITARY PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
CONCERNING
MILITARY DECORATIONS AND AWARDS
ON
DECEMBER 6, 2006

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Brigadier General Richard P. Mills

Director, Personnel Management Division

Brigadier General Mills has served as Director, Personnel Management Division, Manpower and Reserve Affairs, Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps since October 2006.

A native of Huntington, New York, Brigadier General Mills was commissioned in 1975 via Officer Candidate School. Following the Basic School, Lieutenant Mills reported to 1st Battalion, 5th Marines where he served as a Platoon Commander, Company Executive Officer, and the Battalion Adjutant. From 1978 to 1979 Lieutenant Mills served with the 3d Marine Division on Okinawa. Lieutenant Mills was assigned to the 2d Recruit Training Battalion, Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina, from 1979 to 1982 where he served as a Series Commander. Upon promotion to Captain, he assumed duties as Commanding Officer, Company D. Next, Captain Mills was a student at the Amphibious Warfare School, and from 1983 to 1986, served with the 6th Marines as the Commanding Officer of Alpha Company and as the Regimental Assistant Operations Officer.



Promoted to Major in 1986, he was assigned to the Officer Assignment Branch, Headquarters Marine Corps from 1986 to 1989 and subsequently attended the Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Quantico, VA. Following a tour as Military Observer with the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in Palestine, Major Mills reported to Marine Air Group 29, 2d Marine Aircraft Wing as the Air/Ground Liaison Officer.

Lieutenant Colonel Mills served as the Operations Officer, 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) from 1993 until 1995. From 1995 to 1997 he was assigned as the Amphibious Exercise Officer on the staff of the Commander Sixth Fleet in Gaeta, Italy. Lieutenant Colonel Mills returned to the 2d Marine Division in 1997 where he assumed command of 3d Battalion, 6th Marines and subsequently Battalion Landing Team 3/6, 24th MEU (SOC).

Colonel Mills' studied at the Royal College of Defense Studies, London, England in 1999 and then returned to II Marine Expeditionary Force as the Officer In Charge of the Special Operations Training Group before commanding the 24th MEU (SOC) from August 2000 until June 2003. While under command of Colonel Mills, the 24th MEU (SOC) participated in Operations JOINT GUARDIAN in Kosovo, Enduring Freedom, and combat operations ashore during IRAQI FREEDOM as part of Task Force Tarawa.

In June of 2003 Colonel Mills reported to Headquarters, United States European Command in Stuttgart, Germany for duty as the Assistant Chief of Staff. Upon selection to Brigadier General in May of 2004, Brigadier General Mills assumed duties as the Deputy Director of Operations at EUCOM where he served until his current assignment.

Chairman McHugh, Congressman Snyder, and other distinguished Members of the Military Personnel Subcommittee, it is my privilege to appear before you today to provide an overview of our Marine military awards system and how we use it to recognize the courageous and selfless achievements of those brave men and women of your Marine Corps whose heroism sets them apart from their peers in the fight against the enemies of freedom in the Global War on Terror (GWOT).

Introduction

Your Marine Corps continues to provide a significant share of the fighting forces engaged in the Global War on Terror. Of the more than 31,000 Marines forward deployed around the world, 20,000 of these are members of the I Marine Expeditionary Force engaged in combat in the volatile Al Anbar Province of Iraq. Marines also play an integral part in the security transition training teams in Iraq that are working to increase the proficiency and combat effectiveness of the Iraqi Security Forces. Additionally, our Marines continue to serve in Afghanistan as they support the training and development of their Afghan counterparts.

Your Marines, and the Sailors who support them, are continuing to perform magnificently under harsh conditions in these conflict areas. Your Marine forces remain committed to winning the GWOT and will continue to focus on warfighting excellence. Each of our young men and women recognizes and appreciates the support from Congress and the support from the American people. Thank you for your support in ensuring that your Marines and their families have the resources, quality of life, and benefits they need to allow them to stay focused on their mission as the Nation's premier force in readiness into the future.

Since the commencement of offensive operations in the Afghanistan in October 2001, more than 10,000 of your Marines, and the Sailors who serve with them, have been awarded

personal decorations for their exemplary performance while engaged in direct combat actions in Afghanistan and Iraq. These personal decorations range from the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal with the Combat Distinguishing Device, to the Navy Cross, and will soon include the Medal of Honor just recently announced by President Bush. Each of these decorated Marines and Sailors demonstrated heroism or exemplary achievement in direct combat that rose to a level above that of their peers, thus marking their performance as worthy of special recognition. While I cannot in this written statement highlight all the citations on every Marine or Sailor thus recognized, I'd like to give you a few examples of the types of heroism that your Marines and Sailors have displayed in these conflicts that have earned them singular recognition for personal valor in combat.

As announced by the President on Friday, November 10, the 231st birthday of your Marine Corps, one of our Nation's finest will be posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor, our nation's highest award for valor, for his gallant actions that saved the lives of two of his fellow Marines in Iraq. You heard the President recite the actions of Corporal Jason Dunham on April 14, 2004, when he and his squad established a vehicle checkpoint after rushing to the aid of a convoy that had been attacked by insurgents. After struggling in hand to hand combat with an insurgent, Corporal Dunham shouted a warning to his fellow Marines that the insurgent had a hand grenade. His fellow Marines saw the live grenade on the ground and then saw Corporal Dunham make the split second decision that resulted in his death. While facing almost certain severe injury or death from the explosion of such a potent weapon, Corporal Dunham covered the live grenade with his helmet and his body to protect his fellow Marines. When the grenade detonated, he was mortally wounded, and died 8 days later after medical evacuation to the National Naval Medical Hospital in Bethesda, Maryland. While the Marines in his squad were

wounded, they survived the blast thanks primarily to Corporal Dunham's selfless act of heroism and sacrifice.

On April 4, 2003, Lance Corporal Joseph Perez distinguished himself by his heroism when, as the point man for the lead squad in his platoon's operations to clear Route 6 in the advance toward Baghdad, he almost single-handedly destroyed an enemy trench system holding up the advance of his company. Although Lance Corporal Perez was the most exposed to the heavy volume of fire, he led the charge down the first trench, destroying the enemy with accurate rifle fire and throwing a grenade into another trench occupied by the enemy. While under heavy fire, he fired an AT-4 rocket into a machine gun bunker, destroying it and enabling his squad to seize the position. While continuing to engage enemy with precision rifle fire, Lance Corporal Perez sustained gunshot wounds to the torso and shoulder. Despite being seriously injured, he continued to provide accurate direction to the squad's fires, enabling them to reorganize and destroy the enemy position. For his outstanding display of decisive leadership, unlimited courage in the face of heavy enemy fire, and the utmost devotion to duty, Lance Corporal Perez was awarded the Navy Cross, our nation's second highest award for valor.

On March 23, 2003, Hospitalman Apprentice Luis Fonseca, serving as a platoon corpsman with a Marine amphibious vehicle platoon, distinguished himself by his heroism in exposing himself to heavy enemy fire while caring for numerous casualties after an amphibious vehicle was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade during the assault on a key bridge. Hospitalman Apprentice Fonseca braved small arms, machine gun, and intense rocket-propelled grenade fire to evacuate five wounded Marines from the burning vehicle to the casualty evacuation point in another amphibious vehicle. There, he administered life saving medical aid to the casualties, two of whom had suffered lower limb amputations. When this second

amphibious vehicle was immobilized by enemy fire, Hospitalman Apprentice Fonseca supervised the movement of four casualties from the damaged vehicle under a hail of enemy machine gun fire, personally carrying one critically wounded Marine over open ground to another vehicle. Following a deadly artillery barrage, he again exposed himself to enemy fire to treat wounded Marines. For his life saving treatment of casualties, his outstanding display of decisive leadership, and his unlimited courage in the face of heavy enemy fire, Hospitalman Apprentice Fonseca was awarded the Navy Cross.

On June 3, 2004, Sergeant Anthony Viggiani, serving as a squad leader in a rifle company conducting an assault on an enemy held ridgeline in Afghanistan, distinguished himself by heroism when his squad came under heavy and accurate fire from a well entrenched enemy force inside a cave. The enemy fire had pinned down one of his fire teams and had wounded two of his Marines. Moving across exposed ground, under direct observation and fire from an adjacent enemy position, Sergeant Viggiani moved by himself to the cave opening, pouring direct rifle fire into the opening. Achieving no effect on the enemy's fire, and braving fire from the adjacent enemy position, he went back to retrieve a grenade. Again under a hail of enemy fire, Sergeant Viggiani moved to within feet of the cave opening and threw in the grenade, thus eliminating the enemy position that was firing on his squad. By destroying the enemy strongpoint, his actions allowed the rifle company to continue their advance up the ridgeline, solidly defeating the enemy. Although wounded by the fire from the adjacent enemy position, Sergeant Viggiani continued to lead his Marines in the attack. For his outstanding display of decisive leadership, unlimited courage in the face of enemy fire, and utmost dedication to duty, Sergeant Viggiani was awarded the Navy Cross.

These examples are but a small sample of the large number of your Marine and Sailors whose valiant service in combat actions in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom set them apart. I am confident that, if they were here talking to you today, each of these Marines and Sailors would tell you that they did not choose to display such a high level of performance and heroism in combat operations in order to receive a personal decoration. Rather, I would expect that they would tell you that they mustered the courage required to move forward in the face of a determined enemy because they were imbued with a love of our country, our Marine Corps, and most importantly, a love of their fellow Marines and Sailors. Your Marine Corps leadership is 100% committed to ensuring that these most deserving young men and women are properly recognized in public forum for their outstanding contributions to maintaining the freedoms our Nation enjoys. That is what our military awards system is designed to accomplish and I can tell you that it is working effectively to award the appropriate personal decorations that our Marine commanders determine are earned by their Marines and Sailors in combat.

Current Military Awards Process

The military award system in the Department of the Navy recognizes that awards are important symbols of tangible and public recognition for rewarding valor, heroism, or meritorious service which are above and beyond what is normally expected. Such special recognition is only warranted where the circumstances clearly serve to distinguish an individual or unit among those performing similar acts or services. While this philosophy applies to both combat and noncombat awards, for the remainder of this statement, I will focus my discussion of the award process on solely those personal decorations awarded for exemplary performance or achievement while engaged in direct combat actions.

Each of our Marine combat commanders takes great care in fulfilling their responsibilities to recognize those Marines and Sailors whose actions distinguish them apart from their peers. The Marine Corps relies heavily on the experience and judgment of our commanders to ensure that they apply the criteria and standards set forth in the Navy and Marine Corps Awards Manual in the most fair and appropriate manner possible. Each of our commanders, from General Officer to platoon commander, is committed to ensuring that Marines and the Sailors who serve with us receive the recognition they are due. This is, by its nature, a challenging process that requires the commanders to distinguish between varying levels of valor and achievement in combat in order to recommend the appropriate level of award. In doing so, the Marine Corps does not apply a “cookie cutter” approach to awarding personal decorations in combat, where one specific type of action results in one specific level of award. Each individual combat action is different and occurs under varying circumstances. The Marine Corps tasks the commanders who submit and review the award recommendations to consider all of the specific aspects of the action demonstrated by the Marine or Sailor in comparison to the actions of others in that command or theater of operations to determine the most appropriate level of award based on the criteria in the Navy and Marine Corps Awards Manual. This time tested review process maintains the consistency and integrity of all awards.

Awarding Authority. With the exception of the Medal of Honor which is approved by the President, the Secretary of the Navy is granted awarding authority for combat valor awards. The Secretary of the Navy retains certain award approval authority at his level but delegates certain specific authority to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy and the Commandant of the Marine Corps for awards for Marines. The Commandant of the Marine Corps may further delegate specific awarding authority to certain specific General Officers.

Submission of Award Recommendations. A recommendation for a personal award may be submitted by any commissioned officer senior, in grade or billet, to the individual being recommended, who has knowledge of any act, achievement, or service that may warrant such award. A recommendation originated by other than the commanding officer of the individual concerned must be forwarded to the commanding officer for endorsement. If an officer is not assigned, the senior enlisted member may forward documentation to the first officer in the chain of command for consideration of the award of a personal decoration. All recommendations must be appropriately justified and sufficiently detailed to allow proper evaluation and decision. Award recommendation must be submitted on a Personal Award Recommendation Form. Each award recommendation must include a detailed Summary of Action that is used by the reviewing officers and approval authority to evaluate the recommendation on the merits of the circumstances of the action. The amount of detail and supporting documentation required depends on the circumstances and the nature of the award being recommended. For all combat awards, a minimum of two eyewitness statements must be included in the award recommendation package. The statements must be in the eyewitnesses' own words and neither statement may be from the individual recommended for the award.

All Marine Corps awards are submitted through the electronic Awards Processing System. This system was developed by the Military Awards Branch in the Manpower and Reserve Affairs Department of Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps in 1999 to expedite the processing of awards within the Marine Corps. This automated system is accessible to all Marines who recommend, endorse, and approve awards, and facilitates timely forwarding of award recommendations for endorsement and final decisions. It eliminates the requirement to mail or hand carry award recommendation packages between the various levels of command and

Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps.

Responsibility of the Chain of Command and Awarding Authorities. Each officer in the chain of command is required to review an award recommendation and make an endorsement as to the merits of the recommended award in accordance with the criteria contained in the Navy and Marine Corps Awards Manual. This process involves review of the award recommendation by an Awards Board appointed at all lieutenant colonel command levels and higher which evaluate the merits of the award and make a recommendation to the commander or commanding general. After a thorough review of the material contained in the recommendation, the commander may make one of the following endorsements:

- Recommend approval of the award
- Recommend approval of a higher award (upgrade)
- Recommend a lower award (downgrade)
- Recommend disapproval of the award
- Return the recommendation for further clarification or justification.

When the award recommendation reaches the approval authority for the level of recommended award, the approval authority has the following options:

- Approve the award.
- Approve a higher award (upgrade), if so empowered, or recommend a higher award to the appropriate awarding authority.
- Approve a lower award (downgrade).
- Disapprove the award.
- Return the recommendation for further clarification or justification.

For combat awards requiring endorsement or approval of the Commandant of the Marine Corps or higher, the award recommendation is forwarded from the Marine Component Commander at the Combatant Command to the Military Awards Branch at Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps. The Military Awards Branch presents the combat award recommendation to the Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps Combat Awards board for review and recommendation. This Combat Awards Board is comprised of Marine General Officers who review the recommendation and evaluate the merits of the award recommendation in view of the criteria contained in the Navy and Marine Corps Awards Manual. The Combat Awards Board makes a recommendation to the Commandant of the Marine Corps, which may be one of those listed above.

If the approval authority for the combat award is above the Commandant of the Marine Corps, he makes an endorsement on the recommendation and forwards it to the Navy Department Board of Decorations and Medals. This Board consists of senior Flag and General Officers and Navy captains and Marine colonels who review each recommendation and make a recommendation to the Secretary of the Navy on the merits of the award. Upon receipt of a recommendation from this Board, the Secretary of the Navy may make any of the decisions listed above on those awards for which he is the awarding authority.

For Medal of Honor recommendations, additional endorsement on the award recommendation is also required from the Unified Combatant Commander and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which is provided to the Secretary of the Navy. In these cases, after receiving these endorsements, the Navy Department Board of Decorations and Medals reviews the recommendation and make a recommendation to the Secretary of the Navy, who in turn

makes a recommendation to the Secretary of Defense. The Secretary of Defense makes a recommendation and forwards the recommendation to the President for final decision.

Timeliness of Award Recommendations. Timely recommendations are essential to a successful awards program. A recommendation should be submitted as soon as possible following the act, achievement, or service upon which it is based. However, due consideration must be given to security requirements, the time required to properly investigate the event, validation of facts, and processing.

The normal time limits for combat awards for Marines are three years from the date of the action for submitting the recommendation and five years from the date of the action for awarding. Awards may be considered beyond these time limits if the delay was due to administrative error or if made through a Member of Congress.

Premature Disclosure. Premature public disclosure of information concerning award recommendations during their processing, including intermediate approval and/or disapproval recommendations, is a potential source of embarrassment and disappointment to both those who are recommended and the Department of the Navy and the Marine Corps. Therefore, personnel involved in the submission and processing of awards are prohibited from commenting on any case under consideration, and all award recommendations are handled on a "FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY" basis until the awards are officially announced or actually presented. In view of the additional sensitivity regarding Medal of Honor cases, exceptional care is exercised to avoid disclosure of any information, including but not limited to, the fact that an individual has been recommended for the award.

Posthumous Awards. For Marines who have distinguished themselves in combat but who are killed in action before the award recommendation has been processed, the Marine Corps

processes the award recommendation in the same manner described above. If approved, the medal will be presented to the next of kin at an appropriate ceremony. The Marine Corps makes every effort to process and award such combat decorations in as timely a manner as possible after the Marine's death. However, the necessary detailed review of combat awards for valor at each level of the chain of command, to include the approval authority, will generally require a longer process that will not allow presentation of such approved awards at the time of burial.

Reconsideration of an Award Previously Considered. Recommendations for awards previously considered by an awarding authority may be reconsidered only upon the presentation of new and relevant material evidence that was not available at the time the original recommendation was considered. Under normal timelines, this new and relevant information must be presented to the originating officer within the time limits of three years after the heroic action. Additional details regarding information that was previously provided and considered in the original award recommendation does not meet the "new and relevant" requirement.

Criteria for Individual Personal Decorations.

The criteria for specific combat awards set forth in the Navy and Marine Corps Awards Manual guides Marine commanders in determining which level of combat award is most appropriate for recognizing the specific acts or performance of their Marines and Sailors in combat. Marine commanders in the chain of command are charged with reviewing the actions of their Marines and Sailors in comparison to the performance and heroism of other Marines and Sailors in their command to ensure that only those most deserving are recognized with a combat award.

Medal of Honor. As our nation's highest award for valor, the eligibility requirements for the Medal of Honor are extremely stringent. The Medal of Honor is awarded by the

President, in the name of Congress, to members of the Naval service who conspicuously distinguish themselves by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of their lives above and beyond the call of duty.

There must be no margin of doubt or possibility of error in awarding this honor. To justify the decoration, the individual's service must clearly be rendered conspicuous above his or her comrades by an act so outstanding that it clearly distinguishes his or her gallantry beyond the call of duty from lesser forms of bravery; and it must be the type of deed which if not done would not subject the individual to any justified criticism. The deed must be without detriment to the mission of the command or to the command to which attached.

The President is the awarding authority for the Medal of Honor. To date, Corporal Jason Dunham is the only Marine approved for award of the Medal of Honor for his actions during Operations Iraqi Freedom.

Navy Cross. The Navy Cross also has stringent eligibility requirements that are only slightly less than those for the Medal of Honor. It is awarded to individuals who, while serving in any capacity with the Navy or Marine Corps, distinguish themselves by extraordinary heroism, not justifying the award of the Medal of Honor.

To warrant this decoration, the act or execution of duty must be performed in the presence of great danger, or at great personal risk, and must be performed in such a manner as to set individuals apart from their shipmates or fellow Marines. An accumulation of minor acts of heroism normally does not justify the award.

The Secretary of the Navy is the awarding authority, and there have been 15 Navy Crosses awarded to Marines and Sailors assigned to Marine units during Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

Silver Star. The Silver Star is awarded to a person who, while serving in any capacity with the Navy or Marine Corps, is cited for gallantry in action that does not warrant a Medal of Honor or Navy Cross.

The heroic act(s) performed must render the individual conspicuous and well above the standard expected. An accumulation of minor acts of heroism normally does not justify the award, but unusual or exceptional cases will be decided on their merits.

The Secretary of the Navy is the awarding authority for this award. There have been 67 Silver Stars awarded during Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

Combat Distinguishing Device. While the Medal of Honor, the Navy Cross, and the Silver Star are only awarded for actions involving direct engagement with the enemy in combat, many of the awards authorized for Marines and Sailors may be given for direct combat actions or meritorious achievement in or outside a combat zone. For those awards involving direct combat action, the Combat Distinguishing Device, a Bronze "V", may be specifically authorized in the award citation for certain awards. Eligibility for the Combat Distinguishing Device is based solely on acts or services by individuals who are exposed to personal hazard involving direct participation in combat operations and not upon the geographic area in which the acts or services are performed. Currently, the "V" may be authorized for wear on the Legion of Merit, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Bronze Star Medal, Air Medal (Individual Award), the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, and the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal.

Legion of Merit. The Legion of Merit may be awarded with the Combat Distinguishing Device for actions in direct combat operations. It is awarded to members of the Armed Forces of the United States who distinguish themselves by exceptionally meritorious conduct in performing outstanding service. To justify this decoration, the service rendered must have been

comparable to that required for the Distinguished Service Medal, but in a duty of lesser, though considerable, responsibility. In general, the Legion of Merit will be awarded to officers in lesser commands at sea, or principal commands on shore, who have performed such exceptionally meritorious service as to justify the award of the Distinguished Service Medal, except as to degree of merit. However, this should not be interpreted to preclude the award of the Legion of Merit to any individual, regardless of grade or rate, whose acts or services meet the requirements. When the degree of achievement or service rendered, although meritorious, is not sufficient to warrant the award of the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star Medal or the Meritorious Service Medal is considered.

Approval authority for the Legion of Merit with the Combat Distinguishing Device is retained at the Commandant of the Marine Corps. There have been 24 Legions of Merit with Combat Distinguishing Device awarded during Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

Distinguished Flying Cross. The Distinguished Flying Cross, which may be awarded with the Combat Distinguishing Device, is awarded to individuals who, while serving in any capacity with the Navy or the Marine Corps, distinguish themselves by heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in an aerial flight. To justify this decoration for heroism, an act in the face of danger, well above those actions performed by others engaged in similar flight operations, is required; for achievement, the results accomplished must be so exceptional as to render them conspicuous among those accomplished by others involved in similar circumstances.

The approval authority for the Distinguished Flying Cross with Combat Distinguishing Device is the Commandant of the Marine Corps. There have been 24 Distinguished Flying

Crosses with the Combat Distinguishing Device awarded during Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

Bronze Star. The Bronze Star can be awarded with or without the Combat Distinguishing Device for heroic or meritorious acts or service in combat operations. The Bronze Star Medal may only be awarded to members of the Armed Forces who are in receipt of Imminent Danger Pay at the time of the actions or service for which they are being recognized. To merit this award, the acts or services must be performed in a manner significantly above that normally expected, and sufficient to distinguish the individual above those performing similar acts or services. The award may be authorized as follows:

(a) Heroic Achievement or Service. A single act of heroism worthy of special recognition, although not to the degree required for the Silver Star Medal, or several minor acts of heroism. An award for Heroic Service may cover an extended period of time; such award does not preclude receipt of an additional award for a specific act within that period, if warranted.

(b) Meritorious Achievement or Service in Connection with Combat Operations. A single achievement or a period of service worthy of special recognition, although not to the degree required for the Legion of Merit. An award for Meritorious Service may cover an extended period of time; such award does not preclude receipt of an additional award for a specific act within that period, if warranted.

The Commanding General, Marine Forces Central Command, as the component commander to U.S. Central Command, has been delegated awarding authority for award of the Bronze Star Medal with Combat Distinguishing Device for Marines and Sailors serving in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. There have been 730 Bronze Stars with

Combat Distinguishing Device awarded during Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

Air Medal. The Air Medal (Individual Award) may be awarded with the Combat Distinguishing Device and is awarded to individuals who, while serving in any capacity with the Armed Forces of the United States, distinguish themselves by heroic or meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight, under flight orders.

The Commanding General, Marine Forces Central Command, as the component commander to U.S. Central Command, has been delegated awarding authority for award of the Air Medal with Combat Distinguishing Device for Marines and Sailors serving in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. There have been 673 Air Medals (Individual Award) with Combat Distinguishing Device awarded during Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom

Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal. This award may also be awarded with the Combat Distinguishing Device. It is awarded to individuals who, while serving in any capacity with the U.S. Navy or Marine Corps, distinguish themselves by heroic or meritorious achievement or service. To merit this award, the acts or services must be accomplished or performed in a manner above that normally expected, and sufficient to distinguish the individual above those performing similar services as set forth in the following:

(1) Heroic Achievement or Service. Act(s) of heroism worthy of special recognition, but not to the degree required for the Bronze Star Medal when combat is involved.

(2) Meritorious Achievement or Service. A single achievement or a period of service worthy of special recognition, but not to the degree required for the Bronze Star Medal or Air Medal when combat is involved, or the Meritorious Service Medal or Air Medal

when combat is not involved.

Approval authority for award of the Navy Commendation Medal with Combat Distinguishing Device resides at the Major Subordinate Command level. There have been 3,205 Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medals with Combat Distinguishing Device awarded during Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom

Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal. The Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal may be awarded with the Combat Distinguishing Device. It is awarded to members of the Armed Forces of the grade of lieutenant commander or major and junior thereto, for meritorious service or achievement in a combat or non-combat situation, based on sustained performance or specific achievement of a superlative nature, and shall be of such merit as to warrant more tangible recognition than is possible by a fitness report or performance evaluation, but which does not warrant a Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal.

(1) Professional achievement that merits the award must:

(a) Clearly exceed that which is normally required or expected, considering the individual's grade or rate, training, and experience; and,

(b) Be an important contribution of benefit to the United States and the Naval Service.

(2) Leadership achievement that merits the award must:

(a) Be noteworthy;

(b) Be sustained so as to demonstrate a high state of development or, if for a specific achievement, be of such merit as to earn singular recognition for the act(s); and,

(c) Reflect most creditably on the efforts of the individual toward the accomplishment of the unit mission.

Approval authority for award of this award resides at the Major Subordinate Command level. There have been 5,938 Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals with Commendation Medals with Combat Distinguishing Device awarded during Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom

Combat Action Ribbon. The Combat Action Ribbon is awarded to members of the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard (when the Coast Guard, or units thereof, operate under the control of the Navy) in the grade of captain/colonel and junior thereto, who have actively participated in ground or surface combat. The principal eligibility criterion is, regardless of military occupational specialty or rating, the individual must have rendered satisfactory performance under enemy fire while actively participating in a ground or surface engagement. Neither service in a combat area nor being awarded the Purple Heart Medal automatically makes a service member eligible for the Combat Action Ribbon. The following amplifying guidance is provided:

(a) Direct exposure to the detonation of an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) used by an enemy, with or without the immediate presence of enemy forces, constitutes active participation in a ground or surface engagement. Eligibility under this criterion is retroactive to 7 October 2001.

(b) Personnel who serve in clandestine or special operations, who by the nature of their mission, are restricted in their ability to return fire, and who are operating in conditions where the risk of enemy fire was great and expected to be encountered, may be eligible for the Combat Action Ribbon.

(c) The Combat Action Ribbon will not be awarded to personnel for aerial combat, since the Strike/Flight Air Medal provides recognition for aerial combat exposure;

however, a pilot or crewmember forced to escape or evade, after being forced down, may be eligible for the award.

(d) Current Department of the Navy personnel who were formerly in the U.S. Army and earned the Combat Infantryman Badge or Combat Medical Badge, upon submission of official military documentation to their commanding officer, may be authorized to wear the Combat Action Ribbon.

(e) Under Public Law 106-65, the Combat Action Ribbon may be awarded retroactively to 7 December 1941.

The Secretary of the Navy, or his designee, determines which operations meet the criteria for this award. There have been approximately 69,000 Combat Action Ribbons awarded during Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

Historic Award Recommendations Under 10 U.S.C. Section 1130

As stated above, in accordance with 10 U.S.C. Section 1130, upon the request of a Member of Congress, the Secretary of the Navy will review any proposal for a new award or an upgrade of an existing award, and make a determination, based on the merits of the case, regardless of time limits prescribed by policy or law. All Section 1130 requests on Marines are reviewed by the Commandant of the Marine Corps to both ensure the completeness of the recommendation package and to provide a recommendation regarding the merits of the case. Complete packages are submitted to the Secretary of the Navy, via the Navy Department Board of Decorations and Medals, with the Commandant's recommendation based solely on the merits of the request, notwithstanding any time limits.

Reconsideration of a previously approved award requires the presentation of new and relevant material evidence that was not available at the time the original recommendation was

considered. Additional details regarding information that was previously provided in the original award recommendation will not meet the “new and relevant” requirement. If, however, new and relevant information is available, and consideration for an award upgrade is desired after the normal time limits have passed, the request may be submitted through a Member of Congress in accordance with 10 U.S.C. Section , as noted in the previous paragraph.

All award recommendations received under Section 1130, whether for new awards or awards previously considered, must be submitted with a complete and signed award recommendation package. The recommending officer must have been senior in grade, at the time of the action(s) or service, to the individual being recommended for an award. Additionally, the recommending officer must have knowledge of all of the action(s) or service cited; that is, the recommending officer must have either observed the actions or been provided information by an individual who observed the actions. Recommending officers who did not personally witness the action must have been associated, by virtue of their position in the command, with the incident and/or the individual being recommended for the award. If the recommending officer is not the Commanding Officer, the Commanding Officer, if available, must endorse the recommendation. If it is no longer possible to route the recommendation through the Commanding Officer (e.g., the Commanding Officer is deceased), a signed statement to that effect must be included. In this case, another officer who has knowledge of the action(s), and who was senior in the chain of command of the individual being recommended during the period for which recognition is desired, may endorse the recommendation.

If it is not possible to route the award recommendation through all levels of the original chain of command, official military documents such as unit logs, situation reports, investigations, after-action reports, fitness reports, and/or evaluations, must be included to aid in substantiating

the actions delineated in the award recommendation. Since determinations regarding awards are based on verifiable facts, other forms of information such as letters, books, newspaper and magazine articles, personal diaries, etc., will not be considered, as they are not official documents.

The recommendation package must contain a Summary of Action that provides a detailed description of the actions or service performed by the individual or unit being considered for recognition, along with a proposed citation.

For all individual combat awards, at least two notarized eyewitness statements, with contact information for the eyewitnesses, must be submitted. These statements must contain a complete description of the individual's actions and must be in the eyewitnesses' own words, not on a prepared form. Neither statement may be from the individual being recommended for the award.

In the event an incomplete recommendation package is submitted, the Commandant of the Marine Corps will contact the requesting Member of Congress and provide specific guidance regarding the additional information required in order for the case to be considered.

Once award recommendation packages under Section 1130 are received at the Military Awards Branch at Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, they are reviewed for completeness. Recommendations for new awards not previously considered are submitted to the Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps Combat Awards Board, which reviews the package and makes a recommendation to the Commandant. The Commandant subsequently makes his recommendation and submits the package to the Navy Department Board of Decorations and Medals. This board reviews the case and makes a recommendation to the Secretary of the Navy who either makes a final decision for awards of the Navy Cross and below, or makes a

recommendation to the President on recommendations for the Medal of Honor. Upon a decision or an endorsement by the Secretary of the Navy, Congress is informed of the decision.

Difficulty in Comparing Valor Awards Between Conflicts

There is a significant challenge to trying to compare the level of personal decorations awarded for combat in Afghanistan and Iraq with the level awarded during previous conflicts, such as Vietnam. The Marine Corps makes every effort to maintain consistency in the awards process throughout the years, but perfect consistency is impossible, and may be undesirable, in our dynamic military. As stated by the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Manpower and Reserve Affairs in his 12 September 2006 letter to the editor of the *Military Times*,

“The United States enjoys a strong history of military heroes dating back to its inception. Awards for gallantry in action awarded to these heroes have evolved from the Revolutionary War, through at time when the Medal of Honor was the primary valor award during the Civil War, to today where no less than five primary combat awards exist for Department of Navy personnel. I believe it is important to note that as the military continues to evolve and engage in different conflicts over time, it becomes increasingly difficult to draw direct comparisons between different eras, conflicts, and the type and number of awards. An award comparison between service components is equally problematic due to the different campaigns and roles each perform in combat.”

Future Improvements to Award Processing

While I believe you will find the Navy and Marine Corps awards process to be fair and equitable, I realize that it is not perfect and that there is always room to improve the system. To that end, Marine Corps representatives are actively participating in the ongoing Department of Defense Military Decorations and Awards Review directed by the Under Secretary of Defense

for Personnel and Readiness. The goal of this review is to ensure that the policies of the Department of Defense awards system are consistent with the evolving nature of warfare and to recommend improvements to any areas of inconsistency in this policy. Along with other Service representatives, and representatives from the Joint Staff and the Office of the Secretary of Defense, our Marine Corps representatives are heavily engaged in this exhaustive review which we anticipate will lead to several improvements to the Department of Defense awards policy.

Additionally, we will continue to strive to ensure that awards earned in combat by your Marines are processed and awarded in a timely manner while maintaining the integrity of the military awards process. This is a challenging task but one our commanders, Commanding Generals, and the Commandant take very seriously.

Hand in hand with that effort to expedite the review and approval process, we are beginning the initial requirements determination phase of an upgrade to the Award Processing System to make it better able to support timely processing of these important awards. We anticipate implementation of an improved Awards Processing System during 2007.

Conclusion

As your military Services continue to combat the enemies of freedom in the Global War on Terrorism, your Marine Corps will be required to meet many commitments, both at home and abroad. The Marine Corps continues to be a significant force provider and major participant in these joint operations. Our successes have been achieved by following the same core values today that gave us victory on yesterday's battlefields. Marines are proud of what they do! They are proud of the "Eagle, Globe, and Anchor" and what it represents to our country. We must remember that your Marines are making great sacrifices in terms of the family separations and the hardships they face every day they are deployed in harm's way. It is our job to duly

recognize those Marines whose actions rise above the already high standards of this renowned fighting organization. We are committed to ensuring that our military awards process recognizes the bravery and courageous acts of those men and women whose extraordinary actions distinguish them from the rest of their highly professional and dedicated peers. With your support, a vibrant Marine Corps will continue to meet our nation's call as we have for the past 231 years! Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.